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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000889

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#) [GM](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: ARMENIA TO DEPLOY PEACKEEPERS TO AFGHANISTAN IN
2010

Classified By: CDA Joseph Pennington, reason 1.4 (b,d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) After only one day of debate, on December 8 Armenia's National Assembly (parliament) approved in overwhelming fashion the February 2010 deployment of up to 80 Armenian peacekeepers to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Parliament's swift approval of the deployment contrasted dramatically with the lengthy and difficult 2004 parliamentary debate which preceded the deployment of Armenian peacekeepers to Iraq. Hrayr Karapetian, chairman of the parliament's Defense and National Security Committee, told the DATT and PolOffs that the decision to deploy peacekeepers to Afghanistan was an easy one, and one partly explained by the GOAM's on-going efforts to improve relations with emerging democracies in Armenia's neighborhood. END SUMMARY.

SHORT DEBATE, SWIFT APPROVAL OF ISAF DEPLOYMENT

¶2. (C) On December 8, Armenia's parliament overwhelming ratified the agreement signed by Armenian Defense Minister Seyran Ohanian and NATO officials in November 2009 committing Armenia to deploy between 35-80 peacekeepers to ISAF as part of the German contingent serving in Kunduz. (Comment: Although open source press reporting cites an upper number of 80 troops, the Armenian MoD has repeatedly told us that the contingent will not exceed 40 troops. The deployment will consist of three six-month rotations of Armenian peacekeepers, so in total approximately 120 peacekeepers will be involved. End Comment.) The overwhelming approval came after a one-day debate, in stark contrast with the lengthy and arduous debate in 2004 that preceded Armenia's deployment of peacekeepers to Iraq.

¶3. (U) During his address to parliament on December 7, Defense Minister Ohanian announced that, if approved, Armenia would dispatch a 40-person strong contingent comprised of an army platoon with three staff officers and one military medic. "The main mission of the Armenian contingent," Ohanian told lawmakers, "will be to protect the runway and other airport facilities in the northern city of Kunduz." Ohanian said the peacekeepers would complete a three-week training course in Germany prior to their February 2010 deployment alongside the German contingent in Kunduz.

¶4. (U) The deployment was backed not only by the pro-government ruling coalition majority in parliament, but also by the majority of opposition MPs from the Heritage party and the nationalist Armenian Revolutionary Federation

- Dashnaktsutiun (Dashnaks). But some in the opposition who supported the deployment could not resist the chance to take a swipe at the Armenian authorities. Vahan Hovannisian, the leader of the Dashnak parliamentary faction, sarcastically noted that "the situation with democracy (in Armenia) is so brilliant ... that we are now going to help establish democracy in Afghanistan." (Note: Hovannisian voted for the deployment. End Note.)

BENEFITS/RATIONALE OF CONTRIBUTING TO ISAF

¶15. (U) During his address to parliament, Defense Minister Ohanian stated that "this mission will contribute to the accomplishments of our national objectives. We will gain a stake in the formation of an international security system." Ohanian also noted that neighboring Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey already have troops on the ground in Afghanistan.

¶16. (C) On December 15, the DATT and PolOffs met with the Dashnak Hrayr Karapetian, the chairperson of the parliament's Defense, National Security, and Internal Affairs Committee -- and former deputy speaker of the parliament -- to get his take on the swift approval of the deployment. Karapetian noted up front that the Dashnaks had vociferously opposed the 2004 deployment to Iraq, largely because of the Diaspora-based party's fears of Muslim extremist reprisals against Christian Armenians living in the Middle East. He said the party had no such

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fear this time around, with no significant Armenian population in Afghanistan, and that this was one of the reasons they lent their unanimous support to the ISAF deployment, and why the deployment was an easy one to approve for the parliament.

¶17. (C) Karapetian said another factor behind the Dashnaks' support of the ISAF deployment was the success of Armenian peacekeepers in both Iraq and NATO-led peacekeeping operations in Kosovo, and Armenia's increased confidence in its peacekeeping capabilities. Most importantly, he said, the political situation in Armenia's neighborhood has changed, with the emergence of nations with evolving democratic traditions. Karapetian asserted that Armenia must come to terms with these changes, and improve its relations and practices with such countries. "We know everything from the Soviet Army," Karapetian stated, and "we need the experience of Western countries and Western structures, including, for example, the tradition of civilian control of the military." Karapetian stressed that "this is what we are pursuing in our relationship with NATO and our work with Western-inspired organizations such as the OSCE."

COMMENT

¶18. (C) Since assuming his post in April 2009, Defense Minister Ohanian has repeatedly and publicly stated that "Armenia must no longer be viewed only as a consumer of international security, but as a contributor as well." Under his watch, Armenia has doubled its contingent of peacekeepers to Kosovo and now committed to ISAF. While Ohanian has played a constructive role in these developments, the initiators of Armenia's first peacekeeping contribution to Iraq and the subsequent contributions to Kosovo were then-Defense Minister Serzh Sargsian and Artur Aghabekian, Karapetian's predecessor as Defense Committee chairperson. As the ISAF deployment illustrates, President Sargsian continues to support such deployments, calibrating their modest size with the need to

preserve manpower at home in the event of renewed hostilities over Nagorno-Karabakh.

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